

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I wish to inform you that the medical examination carried out in accordance with your instructions of all USAF officers and airmen stationed overseas and in the Internal Zone has been completed. I enclose herewith the detailed report on this matter prepared by a group of experts.

Availing myself of the opportunity I wish to make several personal observations in this connection and draw your attention to the following:

According to the estimates made by the experts, 67.3 per cent of all crew members that have undergone the examination suffer from psychoneurosis. It is an impressive figure and cannot fail to cause alarm. The report indicates that the situation is especially adverse among the officers and airmen serving overseas as well as among those in the Strategic Air Command of the Internal Zone. (My further observations will deal only with the latter category.)

2. Most striking in general is the condition of psychostasia which in majority of cases finds its expression in excessive impressionability, in actions inadequately controlled by the subject's will, in all sorts of phobias, particularly in "flight phobia" as well as hysterical syndromes and fits of unaccountable animosity.

3. After an additional thorough study of the data on this problem we have ascertained that the accidents that have occurred during the last six months on Midway Island, at the Cooke AFB (Calif.) and at the Patuxent River AFB (Md.) as well as opening of fire on the civil population (Wisc.) and a number of similar cases have occurred not so much for the reasons of technical failures as due to psychic deficiency of the crew members.

4. The study of the cases of the chronic overstrain of the nervous system among the pilots and navigators of the Strategic Air Command indicates that the chief factors conducive to such a condition are the following: a great strain particularly due to intercontinental flights; excessive and systematic use of alcohol (quite often even in flight); use of narcotic drugs (particularly cigarettes containing opium and marijuana); sexual excesses and perversions; extreme fatigue due to constant card playing. At the same time moral depression is a typical condition of all crew members making flights with atomic and H-bombs. (See p.p. 17-24, special section of the enclosed report.)

5. During the medical examination progress my colleagues and I consulted a number of representatives of the Air Forces regarding the means on how to improve the physical condition of pilots and navigators. These representatives insist that the flight personnel must be thoroughly renewed. I believe you will agree, however, that this is practically impossible to do.

Our repeated attempts since early 1953 to raise the physical requirements of persons entering the USAF have encountered the resistance of the Air Force Command. The AFC fears, and I believe not without reason, that in that case the number of USAF personnel would be far below the necessary minimum of officers and airmen. Moreover the number of young men entering flying schools, as you are aware, has drastically decreased lately and the tendency is continuing.

6. I am no expert in aviation technique and engineering, yet I hold that certain measures proposed by experts i.e. further improvement of aircraft equipment, brighter lights of the ground signal systems and beacons, installation of additional direction signs, etc. will no doubt decrease to some extent the number of accidents. On my part I would ask for more time to think over suggestions on how to improve medical service in the USAF. I must admit with all sincerity, however, that the proposed engineering measures as well as any possible measures concerning medical service will not solve the problem of radical improvement of the physical condition of the USAF personnel as a whole which according to the data supplied by the last medical examination is far below the contemporary requirements.

I would deem it expedient to acquaint the USAF Chief of Staff, the Commanders of Strategic and Tactical Air Commands, the USAF Commanders in Europe and the Pacific Zone as well as Commanders of the Units with the report of the experts and particularly with their conclusions and suggestions.

Sincerely yours,

Frank B. Barry, M.D.
Assistant Secretary of Defense

ANNEX 3
The Berry Letter,
as surfaced in
Neues Deutschland
on 7 May 1958